

5 Core Values for Parents

What I Have Learned from Youth Sports

by Tom Williams, Soccer Parent and Volunteer

I've been blessed with some great experiences in watching and participating in youth sports. Those good experiences have come just lately, since my own youth sports career was pretty bleak. The good Lord blessed me with two left feet, and all thumbs on both hands. He saw fit to add to the insult by giving me just about zero eye-hand coordination. The closest I came to sport in high school was marching band.

Fortunately, my children have some talent, so I've been able to experience sport through them. Since my stepson, Alan, just graduated from high school, I've been thinking lately about what he and I have learned over the last few years. Alan has been lucky to have some great coaching, good teams, and excellent friends, during his youth, and I've been very lucky to tag along. Both of us have learned as we went, and he went pretty far, garnering a State Championship in his final event, in his final year....what a way to end a high school career!

Along the way, I've learned some things that are important, and weren't inherently obvious. I hope by sharing this information, maybe somebody else can be spared the mistakes that I made, or saw my friends make. This isn't a top ten list, only 5 things, but they're all significant.

Number 1: The Value of Teamwork

The most important lesson that a kid can learn from participation in youth sports is the value of teamwork. We've been blessed with some good teams, and some not so good, but one thing we've both learned, you can't build a successful season on one person. If children can internalize that lesson, they should succeed in life, because our world is increasingly reliant on big organizations, corporations and large companies, and teamwork is paramount for success in those types of businesses.

Number 2: The Value of Coaches

Coaches are great people; respect them. Alan's been lucky, by and large, with his coaches. Most have had good knowledge of their respective sports. The best ones have been good examples for him. Coaches that display love of their sport, kindness to their players, and high moral character are the best possible role models for our children. There have been a few that were exceptional, including the coaches in the last two sports he played. Coaches teach by what they say, and they teach by example, and some of them forget that last part.

Number 3: The Value of Watching What You Say

As a parent, be careful what you say about somebody else's kid. You may regret it. One thing that parents sometimes don't remember is, if you're kids are playing on a team with another kid when they're eight, it's very likely that you'll be playing with the same kid when they're eighteen. If you get "sideways" with another parent when your kids are young, the next few years may be unnecessarily uncomfortable. Harsh words, whether directed at your child or some else's, are remembered; remember that.

Number 4: The Value of Volunteering

Parents just have to volunteer and participate, to make youth sports happen. All those sports leagues don't just blossom from nothingness; it takes referees, coaches, field caretakers, team moms, team managers, scorekeepers, umpires, concession workers....it takes a lot of people! Don't duck your head and hide when the organizer asks for help, get involved!

Number 5: The Value of Just Getting Out There

Lastly, I've learned the value of just getting out there and doing something. Every child has some gift, some ability, to play some sport. Parents must be there, sometimes forcing them to play, taking them to practice, attending those games, and being there for them when things don't go as expected. That's part of the job of being a parent, and the payoff is spectacular.